

May 28, 1812: "British, Scotch, Irish, brave countrymen! who, for mistaken views, have abandoned your happy native soil, a most favourable opportunity is now offered to you, of returning your allegiance to the best of Kings, and to the only remaining Free and happy country in the world. . . . British subjects of unsullied loyalty will alone be received into the . . .

Glengary Light Infantry." QUEBEC GAZETTE.

A Myth Is Good For A Smile

It is customary in Canada, when the name Laura Secord comes up, to think sweet and grateful thoughts, for Canada's most conspicuous chain of candy shops is named after the heroine of Beaver Dam. In the words of Mrs. Secord's granddaughter, she was "modest and unassuming." According to legend, she was one of the two persons primarily responsible for a significant American defeat during the War of 1812. The other, Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, was neither unassuming nor modest.

Mrs. Secord left her Queenston home when "the cannon balls were flying around in every direction." When she returned, she found her husband wounded and the house occupied by American officers. One day in June, she eavesdropped while they were entertaining Colonel Boerstler, who was about to attack Beaver Dam. He was confident that "that position once captured, Upper Canada is ours."

Mrs. Secord left home the next day shortly before dawn, leading a cow. She told the guard that she was going

to visit a sick brother.

She walked all the rainy day, crossing swollen streams by creeping on her hands and knees over fallen logs. She went nineteen hard miles, arriving by moonlight at a Caughnawaga Indian camp, where she persuaded the chief to take her to his British allies.

She informed Lieutenant James Fitzgibbon that Colonel Boerstler could be expected down the main road.

Fitzgibbon waited — Boerstler arrived.

Captain Dominique Ducharme of the Indian Department and three hundred Caughnawagas slipped in behind him. They were joined by one hundred Mohawks. Boerstler and his five hundred troops were in the middle. The Indians opened fire. Boerstler was wounded, and retreated to a hollow.

Fitzgibbon sent a bogus delegation to discuss surrender. One man impersonated the British Commander in Chief, and another, his second in command. The delegation explained to Colonel Boerstler that he was hopelessly outnumbered. To give credence

to the boast, Fitzgibbon took the few troops available and marched them back and forth across the same fields while bugles blared and drums rolled. Boerstler, poor man, wounded and surrounded, was persuaded.

The odd war went on.

On April 27, 1813, eighteen hundred Americans from Sackets Harbor burned part of York, the capital of Upper Canada. The British returned the favour during the summer of 1814, when they burned part of Washington,

DC. The Americans retreated to Baltimore where one of them wrote a song.

In 1814, Great Britain and the US negotiated the Peace of Ghent — a return to the prewar status quo. The last great battle, New Orleans, was fought after the treaty was signed.

There was a sense of satisfaction on both sides. The United States had fought a great European power, and Britain's North American colonies had stood up to their brash republican neighbours.

Laura Secord

Public Archives of Canada



Calendar grid for May 1976. Days of the week: S, M, T, W, T, F, S. Dates: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23/30, 24/31, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.